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POLAND: Party Openly Split

The political crisis in Poland has greatly intensified as a result of the bitter debate at the two-day Central Committee plenum. Party leader Kania and the moderates backing him still seem to be in control, but attacks by the hardliners will continue. The Soviets must be dissatisfied with the outcome of the plenum and will increase political and military pressure on Poland. This likely will include new Warsaw Pact exercises.

Moderates backing Kania yesterday rebuffed efforts by hardliners to force his resignation and postpone the party congress. In this narrow sense, the moderates prevailed. The meeting--the most important in Poland since 1956--ended without personnel changes, but the polarization within the top party leadership is greater than ever. It is likely that the weeks leading up to the congress, scheduled to begin 14 July, will be politically chaotic.

In the long and raucous debates, the conservatives accused Kania of being unable to lead the country out of its current crisis, castigated his repeated concessions to Solidarity, and called into question his policy of seeking only political solutions to problems. They also sharply criticized the party's loss of control of the media--including its own daily paper--and expressed deep concern about the preparations for the party congress.

Supporters of Kania's moderate reformist policies counterattacked, but the 140 members of the Central Committee seemed intent on avoiding a final showdown. The members probably calculated that to oust Kania and replace him with a hardliner would lead to open rebellion from the party's rank and file. On the other hand, to oust the conservatives, who have Moscow's support, would bring a quick confrontation with the Kremlin.

The moderates may take satisfaction in the outcome of the meeting since they are well aware that the conservatives are losing badly in the elections for delegates

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for the congress and will not be returned to the leadership. The conservatives, knowing they have little to lose, may try again to force a confrontation and postponement of the congress.

Kania's personal victory may not be long lived. He has been criticized by moderates for being too passive, and a new Central Committee--to be elected at the congress--might turn to a more dynamic leader who could more effectively control and guide the pressures for reform.

Likely Soviet Reaction

Moscow, after going to extraordinary lengths to impress upon the Polish party the need to take immediate and decisive action against liberalization, is undoubtedly dissatisfied with the outcome. The Soviet media have remained unusually silent on the plenum.

By playing one of its strongest political cards--the letter to the Polish Central Committee, which was broadcast over Polish national television last night--the Kremlin's credibility is on the line as never before. If the status quo essentially prevails in Poland after such a stern warning, the Soviets would risk being shown as impotent in the face of Polish "renewal."

Moscow is now almost certain to step up its pressure on Warsaw to postpone the congress, especially if--as expected--hardliners in the Polish party continue to fail to get elected as delegates to the congress. A Warsaw Pact summit and Pact military maneuvers in or around Poland before the congress appear more and more likely.

The only solace Moscow can take from the plenum is the fact that many Central Committee members spoke out firmly in support of the arguments in the Soviet letter. By forcing the issue, the Soviets may have jolted some party members who had earlier taken a low profile into openly throwing in their lot with Moscow.